# AN ANALYSIS OF SYNTACTICAL ERRORS MADE BY GRADE XI STUDENTS OF SMA NEGERI 4 PALU IN CONSTRUCTING ENGLISH SIMPLE SENTENCES

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**Abstrak**

    *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisa kesalahan siswa dalam membuat kalimat sederhana Bahasa Inggris. Sampel dari penelitian ini adalah siswa kelas sebelas SMA Negeri 4 Palu yang berjumlah 148 siswa. Peneliti menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif. Data diperoleh berdasarkan tugas yang dikerjakan oleh siswa yaitu membuat kalimat dan menulis essay. Peneliti menemukan beberapa tipe kesalahan yang dibuat oleh siswa, yaitu 12 macam penghilangan,13 macam salah penggunaan,1 macam salah formasi, dan 2 macampenambahan. Setelah menganalisa tipe-tipe kesalahan tersebut, peniliti menemukan keslahan yang paling sering dan pertama dibuat oleh siswa dalam menulis adalah penghilangan (673 atau 66.67%), kedua adalah salah penggunaan (242 atau 23.98%), ketiga adalah salah formasi (53 atau 5.25%), dan kesalahan yang paling sering terjadi terakhir adalah penambahan (41 atau 4.06%). Dari data tersebut, dapat disimpulkan bahwa penghilangan merupakan kesalahan yang paling umum yang dibuat oleh siswa kelas XI SMA Negeri 4 Palu.*
**Kata Kunci:** *Analisis, Kesalahan Sintaksis, Kalimat Sederhana Bahasa Inggris*

Grammar is one of the important components in English. It is the head of structure, whilst structure has several functions as the tools in expressing ideas, feelings and opinions. In grammar, the students will learn about the word categories, phrases, and the types of sentences. Constructing simple sentences sometimes isstill hard to do for the students since the students have to know about the parts of structure. In spite of this, in learning the structure the students will know about tenses, clauses, word categories, and the like. In a senior high school, a teacher teaches specific parts of grammar such as: tenses, clauses, passive voices, adjectives, and many more.Talking about adjectives, most people commonly know only about common adjectives, such as: beautiful, handsome, hungry, angry, sad and so on. In fact, there are only few of them know about an adjective derived from a verb by adding suffixes (present and past participle) such as:

interesting, tired, and overwhelming. Those adjectives are called *participial adjectives*.

It is proven by the fact that the students cannot differentiate between the present participle and the past participle. They are still confused about them. Furthermore, the researcher also finds that the students still have errors in constructing simple sentences. The students usethe incorrect BE and/or use inappropriate words in their sentences. The fact indicatesthat theystill lack of grammar. Dealing with the students' problems in constructing English sentences, the researcher assumes that through the application of the error analysis, the students' problems can be solved. The error analysis is used to analyze students' errors in constructing English simple sentences. The students will be asked fordoing some assignments which consist of constructing sentences and writing an essay in the simple present form. Then, the researcher finds out some units of errors such as missordering, missuse, omission and addition. Further, the researcher knows what students'

problems in learning English until they produce errornous sentences. Thus, the problems can be categorized into two: intra-lingual and inter-lingual errors. Furthermore, by using the error analysis the teacher can design a new lesson plan based on students' needs as a result of analyzing students' errors. Thus, the teachers' ways in teaching what material students need can be improved.

The errors of constructing English simple sentences arestill found in students' documents. They cannot use the appropriate words and use correct BE based on what they have written down. Thus, they produce ungrammatical sentences. To analysis the problems, the researcher formulates a research question as follows:

What are the most common errors make by the students in constructing English simple sentences?

In relation to the research question above, the objective of this research is to know the most common errors made by grade XI students at SMA Negeri 4 Palu in constructing English simple sentences.

## Literature Review
## Error vs Mistake

Most language learners cannot differentiate between an error and a mistake. The error refers to the word 'wrong' which someone does not realize it. Thus, when someone does not know about the knowledge,s/he never tries to solve the problem because s/he thinks that there is no something wrong. However, the mistake is something that someone does and realizes it. S/he then tries to solve whats/he has done. In terms of etymology, the words are more deeply differentiated. The mistake usually exists naturally because students know the knowledge yet they do the wrong application. As Corder (1981) states that a mistake is not an issue of knowledge, but it is an issue of its application. In contrast, the error refers to using the system incorrectly caused by the

lack of the learners' competence. Norris (1983:7) points out, "An error is a systematic deviation, when learner has not learnt something well and consistently."

## The Identification of Errors

Since constructing sentences related to writing and linguistic items, are needed to identify the errors based on the three levels, such as: lexical errors, syntactical errors, and cohesive errors (Xiayou, 2005).

The lexical error refers to the error in a word use. Mostly, the students who learn English feel difficult in choosing words in the appropriate context. That is the reason why the role of vocabulary takes place in the error. As Gu& Leung (2002:25) argue, "As learners strive to build their vocabulary in the target language, they may confuse or distort the basic meaning of the words, misuse word forms and have difficulty with collocations in their speech and writing."

This error has a relation with the grammatical error. The students are getting confused in placing the classes of word in a sentence. Xiaoyu (2005:26) argues: "The learners set up a series of hypotheses about the grammar of the target language on the basis of the linguistic data in the language to which has been exposed." The utterances or sentences that s/he makes serve to test his hypotheses and his errors as the evidence of false hypotheses. It means that the students make errors since they are confused in using the structure of the target language. Thus, they will make hypotheses before constructing a sentence. Additionally, syntactical error refers to an error in the sentence structure. Mostly, the students who learn English as a foreign language make some mistakes in constructing a sentence because they have been influenced by their mother tongue as their basic in learning English.

The cohesive error relates to the semantic meaning. The error of students, in this case, constructs an ambiguous sentence.

Thus, students' sentence cannot be understood directly. In addition, the way students use a conjunction to connect the sentence in wrong way. When the students do that error, the sentence cannot have the connection to other. Xu (1992:26) explains "Cohesion plays an important role in the realization of good texture or coherence – the consistency of meaning which is created by the writer (or speaker) and then recreated by the reader (the listener)." It means that the students will not produce an error in the cohesion when they have a good cohesion in connecting a sentence to another by using the correct conjunction, thus they also will not construct an ambiguous sentence.

**Sentence**

A large unit of words is called a sentence. Greenbaum and Nelson (2002:13) assume, "The largest unit that is described in grammar is normally the sentence." It means that grammar cannot be separated from the sentence because every sentence has rules. It depends on the tense (past and present), aspect (progressive and perfect), voice (active and passive), and the last is modality (future). That is the reason why grammar describes a sentence. Usually a sentence in writing is begun by capital letter (upper case) and ended by full stop (.), question mark (?) or exclamation mark (!).

**Types of Sentence**

Commonly, the types of sentence can be seen by knowing the functions of the sentence themselves. Leech (2006:106) proposes, "Sentences can be classified into three basic types according to their meaning and function in a discourse." Based on the function, a sentence is divided into three types, such as: the simple, compound and complex sentences.

The simple sentence can be identified by seeing the sentence unit, which has a subject and a predicate. Strumpf and Douglas (1999:334) argues "[…] simple sentences; those are, sentences which contain a single

subject-predicate set." It means that when a sentence contains a single subject-predicate it can be called the simple sentence.

The compound sentence can have two or more simple sentences. Sulaeman (2000:9) argues "A compound sentence contains two or more different independent propositions or members." The sentences are linked by using coordinate conjunctions (*and, or, but*). Through that conjunction, the sentence can be connected.

In other hand, the complex sentence contains two or more clauses. The clauses are subordinate clause and main clause. Strumpf and Douglas (1999:341) claim, "When we join a *subordinate clause* to a *main clause* by using a connecting word, we got a **complex sentence**." The subordinate clause has a function to modify or to support the main clause.

**Elements of Sentence Construction**

There are four elements of sentence construction. They are a subject, a verb, a phrase, and a clause. The subject and the verb are the main elements of sentence. The subject describes who or what the verb does. Many grammatical rules refer to the subject. The subject, commonly, comes before the verb. Greenbaum and Nelson (2002:25) point out "The subject comes before the verb even in questions if *who* or *what* or an interrogative phrase such as *which person* […]." Meanwhile, to describe what someone does, it needs a verb to make it complete. A verb holds a main role in the sentence. Without a verb and/or BE, the sentence will be meaningless or it can be said that it is not a sentence. Generally, a sentence consists of a subject and a predicate. The subject contains a noun phrase whilst the predicate contains a verb phrase. Greenbaum and Nelson (2002:23) argue, "Regular sentences consist of a subject and a predicate, and the predicate contains at least a verb."

## RESEARCH METHOD

The design of this was a qualitative design, i.e. the descriptive research. The qualitative research has some types which are based on the research's goals. They are a basic interpretive/qualitative research, a case study research, a content analysis, an ethnographic research, a grounded theory research, a historical research, a narrative research, and a phenomenological research (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Razavieh, 2010). This research wasanalyzed students' errors in constructing English simple sentences, thus the researcher used the basic interpretive/qualitative research. It was because the researcher analyzed the errors of the students as the process of learning English. Ary, et.al. (2010:450) state, "Basic qualitative studies are also called basic interpretive studies by some, provided rich descriptive accounts targeted to understanding a phenomenon, a process, or a particular point of view from the perspective of those involved."

In this research, the population was grade XI students of SMA Negeri 4 Palu and it consisted of 364 students. It consisted of six classes of MIA, four classes of IIS, and one class of BAHBUD. The sample was used to specify the population and it had to represent the population. Latief (2013: 181) points out, "Sample is defined as the smallest of accessible population." The sample was chosen by using the simple random sampling because all classes almost had the same knowledge and abilities. Thus the samplesconsisted 148 students. Furthermore, this research had one instrument. Thus, in this research the researcher had one research instrument, that was an archival document. The technique of data collection for this research was only about document analyses. They were taken from students' assignments and essays. The assignments were the identification and constructing sentences. The identification was 10 numbers and the constructing sentences were 10 sentences. Meanwhile, the essay was done by taking students' archival documents.

In analyzing the data, the researcher used some steps, such as the stages of analyzing errors which had been proposed by Ellis (1997:15). There were three steps of analyzing errors: identification, description, explanation. In identification, the researcher compared students' sentence errors with the original sentence in the target language. The researcher identified the auxiliary verbs, the appropriate adjective, subject, etc. In the description, the researcher analyzed the omission of BE, misusage, and missordering phrases in sentences. In the explanation, the researcher explained why the sentence was claimed as an error. The function of error analysis here could help the researcher to explain and to give the strongest reason why the sentence was ungrammatical.

Even though this research was a qualitative research, the quantification was needed in order to present the frequency and percentage of occurrence of the students' errors in constructing the English simple sentences. First, the error's frequency was computed by using following formula proposed by Huang (n.d.:30):

Relativefrequency=
$$\frac{\text{Number of actual occurrences of errors}}{\text{Number of possible occurrences of errors}}$$

The percentage then was counted by using a formula which was proposed by Sudjana (2005) as follows:

$$P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100\%$$

Where:
P= Percentage
F= Frequency
N= Total of students' error

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data, the researcher finds four errors' type: omission, misusage,

misordering, and addition. Those types of errors become the major error points of the students in producing sentences. Based on the error frequency, the researcher finds that the omission is the biggest error which is made by the students. If we rank it, the positions will be omission (671), misusage (244), misordering (53), and addition (41). All of these errors' type can be categorized into two sources; the inter-lingual errrors and the intra-lingual errors. Based on the findings, mostly the errors' types have the inter-lingual as the errors source and these sources mainly are found in the omission and misordering errors. The results show that the students syntactically make errors. They have been interferenced by their native language (Bahasa Indonesia). Gass (1979:329) states, "Patterns of the NL (of all levels linguistic structure), including both forms and functions are superimposed on the patterns learned in a second language. It means that native language users have a big influence for the students who learn English. The students seems difficult to apply the English sentences' rules with their native language of Indonesian, thus this error can be said as the negative transfer (Wilkins, 1972). One of the examples is *I want introducemy self. In Bahasa Indonesia, when we want to use word *want* instead of *ingin*, we do not need to put the infinitive to. Yet, in English the word *want* should be followed by to infinitive since that is its language rule. It can be seen that Bahasa Indonesisa and English have different rules in the sentence. Thus, this rule makes the students really influenced and they cannot apply the target language rules, they get the negative transfer from their mother tongue.

The misusage and addition errors are classified as the intra-lingual errors since the findings show that the intra-lingual is dominant than that of the inter-lingual. The students make their own hypothesis before constructing sentences since they still discover English as the target language. They can produce this error continously until they complete their English discovery (Xiayou, 2005). The factor can be a gap between Bahasa Indonesia and English. Bahasa Indonesia and English can be measured by using certain parameters based on the Universal Grammar Theory proposed by Chomsky (1986). As Carroll (2005) defines that the parameter as a grammatical feature that can be set to any of several values. The examples can be taken from the omission of subject. For this case, there are two parameters: null-subject (the language allows the sentences without a subject) and subject (the language needs the subject grammatically). The sentence example *Was born on Palu 21 June 1999 is ungrammarical in English, yet in Bahasa Indonesia this sentence would be fine. Thus, it can be said that English is a subject language and Bahasa Indonesia is a null-subject.

To summarize the frequency common errors of the students, it can be seen by following table:

**The Frequency Common Errors of the Students**

| Kinds of Errors | Inter-lingual | Intra-lingual | Total | Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Omission | 466 | 207 | 671 | 336.5 |
| 2. Misusage | 72 | 170 | 244 | 121 |
| 3. Misordering | 53 | - | 53 | 26.5 |
| 4. Addition | - | 41 | 41 | 21.5 |
| **Total** | 591 | 418 | 1009 | 505.5 |
| **Average** | 147.75 | 104.5 | 252.25 | 126.37 |

From the table above, it can be seen that the first common type of errors make by eleventh grade students of SMAN 4 Palu was omission. There are 673 of 1009 or 66.67% students who make these errors. Commonly, the students do the omission error of BE.The students omit BE since they are influenced by their mother tongue (L1). The data above show that the frequencies of inter-lingual are larger than frequency of intra-lingual. Four hundred and sixty-six out of 591 or 78.85% students have the inter-lingual source of their errors. The misusage becomes the second type

of common errors. The totals of the errors in the misusage are 242 out of 1009 or 23.98%. In contrast with the omission, the source of this type of error is the intra-lingual since 170 out of 418 or 40.66% students make misusage of subject-verb agreement. The students do not know and get confused how to use the agreement of BE along with the subject. The third type of common errors belongs to misordering. There are 53 out of 1009 or 5.25% students who make errors in misordering phrases. They cannot order the phrases well since 53 out of 591 or 8.96% students are influenced by their mother tongue. The last type of common errors is the addition. There are 41 out of 1009 or 4.06% errors are found in this research. In this error, mostly the students add the unnecessary BE and/or verb in constructing sentences. It is because the students have limited knowledge in putting the BE and/or the verb in a sentence. Thus, there are 41 out of 418 or 9.80% the intra-lingual source are found here.

These findings are different from what Richard (1970) finds. Mostly he describesthe intra-lingual error and developmental error. He analyzes the errors and classifies them into four errors: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rule, and false concepts hypothesized. In the overgeneralization, he finds that the students make errors by using the third person marker (-s). The teacher instructs them to change:*'He walks quickly'* to continous form, yet the students change it into *'*He is walks quickly'*. The students seemto make an overgeneralization of third person marker (-s) eventhough in the continous tense form. In the ignorance of rule restriction, Richard (1970) reveals that the students seem difficult to apply the rule, thus they ignore it. For example, one of the students makes a sentence *'*The man who I saw him'*. It is clearly that the students violate the English sentence rule. The learners think that there is something incomplete about 'the man who I saw', thus they add the object after the verb,

as they have been taught to do elsewhere. In the ncomplete application of rule, the students respond teacher's question elicitly. For example, teacher asks *'what was she saying?'* and the students answer *'she saying she would ask him'*. It means that the students do redudancy in answering teacher's question. In the false concepts hypothesized, he reveals that the learners have false and get the confusion perception about something. For example, the learners do not know how to differentiate the use of *'too'*, *'very'*, and *'so'*. Since the students say that the use of *'too'* is avoided for children. In fact, *'too'* can be used in the form of sentence too+adjective+infinitive, such the example *'this box is too heavy to lift'*.

By comparing researcher's findings and Richard's findings (1970), it can be concluded that the researcher's finding have more specific errors' type. The samples are also different. Richard (1970) only has 23 samples, whilst the researcher has 148 samples. The researcher usesthesyntactic analysis, since she only focuses on the grammatical form not the meaning. In contrast, Richard (1970) uses all of the identification errors: lexical errors, syntactic errors, and cohesive errors.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

### Conclusions

Based on the data findings, a conclusion can be drawn that the most common errors that are found, belong to the omission. The researcher finds about 13 kinds of omission made by the students and there are 671 omission errors found in this research. The eleventh grade students at SMA Negeri 4 Palu also have 244 misusage errors, 53 errors of misordering and 41 omission errors. For the error sources, the main sources are the inter-lingual errors. These are caused by the influence of students' mother tongue, because mostly the students still get influenced by their mother tongue (L1).

## Suggestions

Based on the conclusion above, the researcher would like to offer some suggestions that might be important for the improvement. First, students need to learn grammar more. They need to learn and practice grammar by using sentence exercises, since practice makes perfect. Second, teacher should use error analyses to design a syllabus and a lesson plan, in order to know students' needs, particularly, in grammar and they should pay attention to students' understanding about BE in English and the subject-verb agreement in order to avoid students errors in the omission and misusage. Finally, the other researchers should ~~be~~ pay attention to the students' grammar in doing sentence exercises, since grammar can support students' language skills and other components of language.

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